

NEBRASKA TRS ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
Public Service Commission Hearing Room
300 The Atrium, 1200 N Street
Lincoln, Nebraska
May 5, 2005

The Nebraska Telecommunications Relay Advisory Committee met on May 5, 2005 at the Public Service Commission Hearing Room in Lincoln, Nebraska.

There being a quorum present, the meeting was called to order at 1:32 p.m. by Tami Richardson-Nelson. The following committee members were present:

Mr. Eric Carstenson;
Ms. Tami Richardson-Nelson;
Mr. Art Nelson;
Ms. Patti Reitz;
Commissioner Gerald Vap.

Mr. James Devaney was absent and Jerry Hohnbaum indicated his absence in advance.

Introduction of Guests: Present from the Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) was Tanya Wendel. Gene Hand and Steve Stovall were present from the Public Service Commission. Present from Hamilton Telecommunications were Dixie Ziegler and Barb Handrup. Francis Beaurivage and Beth Townsend interpreted the meeting.

Approval of the Agenda: Motion by Mr. Nelson to accept the agenda as presented. Ms. Reitz seconded. Upon agreement of all committee members present, the agenda was approved as presented.

Approval of the Minutes of January 13, 2005: Motion made by Commissioner Vap to accept the minutes as presented. Seconded by Mr. Nelson. Upon agreement of all committee members present, the minutes were approved as presented.

Chairperson's Comments:

1.) Tami Richardson-Nelson expressed appreciation to all the sponsors of the Kearney high-speed connectivity demonstration presented on April 16. Sponsors included Hamilton, NCDHH, PSC, Frontier and Charter. There were approximately 50 participants with not as many Deaf/Hard of Hearing in attendance as Ms. Nelson anticipated. Ms. Nelson suggested deferring the Scottsbluff workshop until late August to minimize scheduling conflicts with fall activities.

2.) Tami indicated that Commissioner Vap will address the travel request for the connectivity workshops under "Public Service Commission Comments," item three.

3.) Tami expressed concern over how to raise the level of involvement for the next workshop in Scottsbluff.

Vice Chairperson's Comments: None presented.

Nebraska Commission for the Deaf and Hard of Hearing (NCDHH) Comments:

1.) Ms. Wendel expressed appreciation to Art and Tami Nelson as well as the contributions by Hamilton for making the Kearney workshop a success. About 23 deaf were present in Kearney. It was suggested that the connectivity workshop be extended to Wyoming residents to raise the level of participation.

Public Service Commission Comments:

1.) Updated Relay Statistics – Gene Hand. Mr. Hand indicated the Commission has been able to keep the surcharge at its current seven-cent level while still offering new services, such as CapTel. Mr. Stovall indicated relay statistics have been updated through March, 2005. Also, a new column has been added to the spreadsheet for CapTel intrastate conversation minutes to reflect activity levels for this service. The order setting the surcharge was emailed to all committee members.

Ms. Nelson shared an article from the St. Louis Post-Dispatch indicating that the Missouri Commission is proposing to increase the surcharge from \$.10 to \$.15 per line. Mr. Stovall was asked to investigate and report to the committee.

2.) Equipment Distribution Program update – Steve Stovall. Mr. Stovall indicated that equipment payments to vendors are still strong. The monthly average for actual expenditures in the current fiscal year is about \$30,000. The monthly budget average is \$21,333 for fiscal year 2004-05. The budget amount is determined by statute and equates to what one cent produces each month in revenue. Mr. Stovall suggested that if the current trend continues, raising the cap might be appropriate. CapTel units are steadily increasing with payments going from \$399 in September 2004 to \$5,187 for March, 2005. In terms of payments made, 68 users have CapTel service as of March 2005. Mr. Stovall indicated that the contract addendum signed with Hamilton allows the program to add 10 CapTel users per month after meeting the initial 50-user threshold.

Mr. Stovall shared other relevant statistics regarding the equipment program. Since program inception over 3,347 households have been served, with 2,147 amplified phones being delivered and 958 TTYs. For the current fiscal year, 690 households have been served with 496 amplified phones being delivered and 117 TTYs. These numbers, on an annualized basis will outpace the previous fiscal year's activity.

Commissioner Vap indicated caution in introducing any legislation that would have a fiscal impact on funding, especially in light of recent requests for funding increases by other agencies. Commissioner Vap discussed the PSC proposal to the legislature to raise the wireless E911 ("Enhanced 911") surcharge cap from \$.50 to \$1.00. Not only was the proposal denied, but a directive by the legislature to study the current structure of Public Safety Answering Points

("PSAPs") was the result with the possibility of restructuring PSAPs statewide.

3.) Public Service Commission Comments. Commissioner Vap indicated the recent order on setting the surcharge was to leave the surcharge at its existing seven-cent level. The assessment period for this surcharge is July 1, 2005 through June 30, 2006.

The travel reimbursement request for the connectivity workshops was addressed. Reimbursement requests cannot be made retroactively, since no advance approval or notification was given. Additionally, to receive reimbursement, members must be conducting official business in their capacity as an advisory committee member. The workshops are not official business. It was suggested to incorporate the next advisory committee meeting with the Scottsbluff workshop, which would allow for reimbursement.

Ms. Tami Richardson-Nelson inquired whether more flexible pricing plans could be offered to users of wireless phones for text messaging. Repeated efforts to involve industry have not been successful. Mr. Hand suggested that we draft a letter to the CTIA (cellular association) to allow flat rated pricing for text messaging and suggest a per-use or per minute approach to voice usage. The PSC staff will draft a letter for the Chair's approval and submission. Recent mergers being evaluated at the FCC including AT&T with SBC and the MCI proposed merger with Verizon could result in less choice for consumers. There is also a proposed merger of Western Wireless with Alltel, which could impact wireless consumer choice for rural Nebraska customers.

Hamilton Telecommunications Comments (Ms. Ziegler/Ms. Handrup):

Ms. Ziegler indicated that a national TV broadcast program "Winners Circle" has selected Hamilton to provide a presentation on relay service and activities on MS/NBC May 30, 2005. This show will air between 6:45 to 8:00 a.m.

A DVD project is currently in development by Hamilton promoting awareness and educating the public regarding the various relay services offered. A copy of the DVD will be available to the members after completion. The service promotion will also be available on Hamilton's website upon completion. Ms. Ziegler provided a demonstration on VCO service for the members.

New Business: Two items were presented: 1) The next connectivity workshop for Scottsbluff and 2) Letter being addressed to CTIA industry seeking information regarding pricing plans for text-based messaging. Ms. Tami Richardson-Nelson made a motion to close new business. Seconded by Mr. Carstenson. Upon agreement of all committee members present, motion carried.

Public Comment: None.

Next Meeting: To be determined.

Meeting adjourned at 2:52 p.m. by Ms. Tami Richardson-Nelson.

Respectfully submitted,

Steven G. Stovall - Staff Accountant
Nebraska Public Service Commission
May 13, 2005